

Providing Feedback to Students

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How do we cultivate resilience in our undergraduate students while providing feedback on their research papers or when grading their exams?

Positive psychology (a relatively new discipline) tells us that there are six dimensions to flourishing: positivity, engagement, relationships, meaning, achievement, and vitality. Throughout all six dimensions you will hear about the importance of resilience, an integral aspect of flourishing and essential when discussing well-being. Resilience is best defined as the capacity to bounce back when things go wrong. It involves mindfulness, gratitude, optimism, self-compassion, and grit. Facilitating resilience in our students is a critical ingredient to their learning process.

Self Exploration

Consider your own responses to feedback when exploring how best to increase resilience in your students. Insight into how you respond to feedback from your colleagues or supervisors can lead to greater empathy, creativity, and understanding of your students.

1. When someone says, “I want to give you some feedback,” is your first reaction, “Oh no, here we go again,” or do you assume that it will be positive?
2. When giving feedback, do you assume that it will hurt the person’s feelings and negatively impact your relationship or do you see this as an opportunity to improve the relationship?
3. What are some things that make you feel comfortable about receiving feedback?
 - a. Do you prefer your feedback written or oral?
 - b. Do you prefer to hear the positives first, then the corrections?
 - c. Do you prefer to hear the corrections first, then the positive feedback?
4. Are you aware of your own character strengths (e.g., creativity, curiosity, perseverance, zest, humour, honesty, bravery, teamwork, leadership, etc.) and how they may assist you in the challenges associated with academic achievement? [Explore your top character strengths through this free survey](#) and then consider how you might use your strengths as an instructor.

Feedback that Cultivates Resilience

Feedback should be linked to achievable learning goals. It should be timely, specific, nonjudgmental, behaviourally based, and should offer students specific direction regarding how to improve. Feedback must be direct and clear (not biased or humiliating).

It is best when feedback highlights areas for improvement and gives specific suggestions for change. Balancing between support/reinforcement and challenges/criticism is a good approach. The ultimate goal is to improve confidence and clarify next steps for your student to improve.

Feedback that Decreases Resilience

When you use generalization and replay what went wrong; focusing on blame, only identifying the problems and ignoring what students got right, students will become too defensive and too anxious to learn, so the whole process backfires.

Corrective Feedback Approaches

1. **Sandwich:** “I like the way you [identify a strength]. I’d like to see you do more of [specific behaviour or problem]. Overall, you are making good progress in [area of strength].
2. **Growth Mindset:** Praise effort in support of a growth mindset (curiosity, enthusiasm, risk taking, exploration).
3. **XYZ:** “When you do [X], [Y] is what happens so I suggest that you do [Z].
4. **“I” statements:** “I have observed a pattern here that when (for example: you are not sure how to address an issue, you speak about it in very general, non-specific terms). What do you observe?”
5. **Empathic responding:** “This is a problem that most students have at your stage of development.”
6. **Self-disclosure:** “I struggled with the same thing when I was starting out. Follow this with a strategy you found particularly helpful.”

Checklist for Corrective Feedback

1. Talk about strengths and successes as well as making corrections.
2. Listen without interrupting while your student is making a point.
3. Notice the extra effort or risk taking on the part of the student.
4. Keep feedback focused on behavior (such as frequency and amount).
5. Limit the amount of corrective feedback given to your student at any given time.
6. When giving feedback, focus on encouraging your student to explore options for improvement, not just identifying their mistakes.
7. In order to achieve optimal learning, the balance between supportive and corrective feedback should be based on the degree of anxiety demonstrated by your student.

More Information about Resilience at Ryerson

Direct your students to [Cultivate Your Happiness: A ThriveRU Weekly Workbook](#). This calendar of weekly exercises is designed to help students manage challenges and cultivate their well-being

Workshops available in support of ThriveRU include:

1. **Resilience training:** This four session training module is based on the five factor model of resilience - gratitude, optimism, self-compassion, grit (mindfulness is integrated into the training sessions as well)
2. **Stress management** - balancing the polarities
3. **Character strengths** and the world of work
4. **Changing Habits:** Learn how to start a new habit and break old habits
5. **Implementing the ThriveRU weekly workbook** and cultivating happiness

[Please contact Dr. Diana Brecher for information on these workshops.](#)

[Learn more about providing effective feedback on the LTO’s page on Assessment and Evaluation.](#)